



## **DCR Landscape Designation Process – Spring 2011**

### **Anticipated Questions**

#### **1. Why is DCR doing Landscape Designation – what is the goal?**

DCR's mission is "to protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources." Landscape Designation is about balancing and focusing that mission - setting broad management priorities that reflect different values and using our resources most efficiently for stewardship of the parks system.

The designation of parklands, woodlands and reserves was the core recommendation of DCR's Forest Futures Visioning Process, a year-long public process involving experts, stakeholders and the general public.

The parks system as a whole offers many values, including clean air, clean water, biodiversity, recreation, forest products - and Landscape Designation will guide DCR's stewardship for individual properties and prioritize some of these values. It will also separate certain activities – importantly, commercial harvesting – to minimize conflicts in use.

#### **2. How did DCR decide which properties are designated as "Parklands", "Reserves" or "Woodlands"?**

The year-long Forest Futures Visioning Process involved extensive public input and included a Technical Steering Committee (TSC) composed of 11 experts in various natural resource areas relevant to DCR's mission. The TSC issued a report after considering extensive public input that includes a description of the type of land that is best suited to these three designations. DCR translated these descriptions into criteria that could be used with its Geographical Information System (computer mapping). These criteria were reviewed at 7 public meetings last fall along with draft guidelines for management of the three designations. After reviewing public comments, DCR applied the mapping criteria to evaluate all land in DCR's park system separately for each of the three designations - Parklands, Reserves and Woodlands. As a foundation for this work, DCR completed an analysis to group properties by similar physical landscape setting (also called ecological land units) that was based on a previous regional analysis completed by the Nature Conservancy. This tool allowed for consideration of regional significance, which in turn helped to distribute Parklands, Reserves and Woodlands across the State in keeping with public input. Using these mapping models, staff expertise and familiarity with the properties, DCR staff completed a draft map of the designations that balances the amount of land in the three zones consistent with the TSC recommendations and the Patrick Administration's direction.

### **3. What do these designations mean in terms of how the public can use these lands?**

Recreational access will be maintained across the system and DCR's existing recreational policies will continue to apply (see Q. 15 below for specifics regarding off-highway vehicle use). Maintaining public access to all DCR properties is an important priority. An equally important priority is protecting natural resources and DCR will continue to follow existing policies and procedures guided by other state and federal guidelines, regulations and laws. Landscape designations will help to inform future management decisions over the long term – for example, DCR would not plan to build new roads in Reserves and over time, the public can expect to find a more natural setting with minimal landscaping. However, the public's overall experience in any of the three designations will not change in the immediate short term.

### **4. What can change based on public feedback?**

This spring DCR is presenting draft designations for all of the properties in the parks system. The agency is interested in public feedback that helps the agency implement Landscape Designation while respecting the Forest Futures process and the parameters set by the Patrick Administration. This includes comments and suggestions about the specific designations of individual properties, as well as understanding the larger statewide context in which they were determined (maintaining balance among the three designations).

### **5. How would DCR respond to people who are interested in seeing different acreage allocations – for example, some people would like more Reserves designated while others would like more Woodlands?**

- One of the most important outcomes of the Forest Futures Visioning process was the confirmation that DCR should manage its lands for the full range of ecosystem services, which include biodiversity maintenance, recreation, wood products and forest management demonstration. Landscape Designation is allowing us, through a public process to prioritize the activities and benefits provided by these lands.
- Through the year long process the Technical Steering Committee considered various scenarios (including higher percentages of Reserves and Parklands) and recommended acreage ranges within each landscape designation after considerable deliberation, informed by input from the Advisory Group of Stakeholders and substantial public comment.
- The Patrick Administration accepted those recommended acreage ranges, and added a specific target allocation of at least 60% designated as Parklands and Reserves, while affirming the importance Woodlands in the park system. We believe this represents a balanced approach, and, in fairness to the integrity of that public process, that decision is now behind us, and we are focused on laying out the designations across the parks system and developing management guidelines.

### **6. Why do some properties have more than one designation?**

In some cases, properties are split into multiple designations. Examples include properties that have some undeveloped acreage but also include developed recreational areas such as campgrounds. Because public comments to date have indicated a strong desire to maintain traditional recreational access, Parkland areas were designated within Reserves and Woodlands to address this desire and underscore the continued prominence of recreation across the parks system. Mt. Greylock is a good example – most of the property is

designated a Reserve and the parkway/campground/summit area are designated Parkland, and the public is welcome to enjoy areas throughout the property.

**7. Will any of these Landscape Designations change in the future? What will the process be for this?**

- The Management Guidelines call for an overall review of the Landscape Designations every 10 years. In addition, if a situation arises at any point that suggests the need for a property's Landscape Designation to be re-evaluated, DCR will do so using appropriate planning tools and engaging a robust public process.
- The Forest Futures Visioning Process Technical Steering Committee recommended that Reserve designations be codified in legislation. The agency is currently exploring the best ways to protect all three designations over the long term, while remaining mindful of the future need to adaptively manage properties when conditions and uses change and management considerations may need to be revised as a result. DCR anticipates reflecting all three designations in future regulations.
- The Resource Management Planning process itself will not change the designation of specific areas. However, through the finer-scale RMP planning analysis, Land Stewardship Zones are established that will provide additional layers of protection to some areas within a park or forest, and also identify areas that might be appropriate for a more intensive level of development and management.

**8. Will DCR be designating any "Patch Reserves", as noted in the TSC recommendations, as a part of this process?**

The TSC recommended that DCR designate "patch reserves" within each of the three Landscape Designations to identify areas where standard best management practices may not be adequate to fully protect highly significant and sensitive ecological or cultural resources from certain human uses or management and to recognize areas of special significance to park users and the public.

While DCR supports the goal behind the TSC's recommendation for "patch reserves," the agency believes the term "patch reserve" has different meanings for different people, and as the TSC pointed out, these areas would be selected by different criteria and have an altogether different set of goals than the land designated as landscape-level Reserves. Therefore, rather than designate "patch reserves," DCR will identify sensitive resources and apply specific management guidelines to protect them through its Resource Management Planning process. Importantly, this process provides an opportunity for public input.

**9. When will DCR resume timber harvesting?**

Once the landscape designation process is complete, DCR will resume timber harvesting in the Woodlands, in keeping with the TSC's recommendation to demonstrate excellent forest management practices and focus on smaller opening sizes until finer scale planning can be completed. As additional Forest Resource Management Plans are updated, DCR will use the Landscape Designation Management Guidelines as guidance for planning demonstration forestry projects. Specifically, going forward, Silviculture Levels 1, 2 and 3 will direct the protection of significant resources as well as guide harvesting techniques.

**10. How much timber will DCR harvest in Woodlands?**

Small amounts of timber will be harvested in the areas designated as Woodlands, adhering to the TSC's recommendation of limiting openings up to one-third acre until existing Forest Resource Management Plans are updated to reflect the Landscape Designation Management Guidelines. Harvest levels for each forest

management district will be determined based on the new landscape designations (how much land in a respective district is in the Woodland Zone) and the goal of demonstrating excellent forestry in order to promote a healthy and diverse forest.

**11. Will hunting be allowed in each designation?**

Hunting will be allowed in Parklands, Reserves and Woodlands, consistent with current DCR and other state and local laws and regulations.

**12. Will dogs be allowed in each designation? How about dogs off-leash?**

The Landscape Designation management guidelines do not propose any changes to current DCR rules and regulations regarding dogs. Dogs on-leash are allowed in all zones as consistent with DCR rules and regulations. DCR is working to designate some trial areas for allowed off-leash dog recreation.

**13. How will emergency access and safety be maintained in areas designated as Reserves and how will DCR assure that local emergency management personnel will be able to respond to incidents within Reserves?**

Public safety is a top priority for the agency. Maintenance of emergency access roads will not end due to Reserve designation. Existing roads will be evaluated over time and those necessary for emergency access will be managed and maintained, as available internal and external resource allow. These decisions will be made in coordination with local emergency management officials.

**14. Why does Landscape Designation not apply to the Quabbin and other watershed lands, which are managed by DCR?**

The Quabbin, Wachusett and Ware River watersheds are managed by DCR's Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP), in partnership with the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority. Although part of DCR, the DWSP is funded and overseen by a separate governing body – the Water Supply Protection Trust Board – and not the DCR Stewardship Council. However, the DWSP is undergoing its own review of land management by an independent panel of scientists, which will include opportunity for public input.

**15. How will the new designations affect Off-Highway Vehicle use – where will OHVs be allowed?**

- Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) such as all terrain vehicles and off highway motorcycles have the greatest environmental and social impact of any legal recreation activity allowed on DCR lands. Without active management and continuous maintenance, trails supporting these uses can quickly become eroded and result in siltation and damage to wetlands and other resource areas. In addition, the noise and social impacts from these machines is inconsistent with the stated goals for Reserves, e.g. quiet and even spiritual appreciation of the natural environment.
- At the same time, DCR recognizes that OHV recreation is enjoyed by tens of thousands of Massachusetts families across the state. Legal, safe and well-managed opportunities to enjoy OHV recreation in appropriate locations addresses the recreation desires of a substantial number of residents, contributes to effective OHV enforcement and helps protect sensitive lands where illegal use may occur absent legal alternatives.

- As DCR transitions to the landscape designation model, some areas where OHV recreation is currently allowed are proposed to be designated as Reserves. In these cases, DCR is committed to applying the fine filter criteria developed in 2007 to determine whether the location may be able to provide safe and sustainable OHV recreation. If so, DCR will continue that use, but may also seek alternative locations for OHV recreation where management of this intensive recreational activity better matches the desired goals and conditions of the surrounding landscape.

#### **16. How will the new designations affect trails and trail uses?**

With the exception of continued OHV use in newly designated reserves, which will be evaluated, Landscape Designation has no other impacts to existing recreational uses. Public access at existing facilities and designated trails will continue within all three designations. As per current DCR trail policy, trail relocations, closures and new trail development may occur to reduce adverse impacts to critical resources and enhance recreational experiences provided.

#### **17. How will DCR respond to events such as fire, disease or insect infestations, invasive species, and other serious threats to forest stands?**

In keeping with DCR's overall mission, the agency will continue to manage threats to public safety and ecological health on all of its properties, within all three Landscape Designation. It's important to note that this may involve more active management (e.g., on Reserves and Parklands) than might otherwise be considered appropriate. Recent experience with Asian Longhorn Beetle and other serious threats to our forest resources highlight the need for such occasional interventions.

#### **18. How will the guidelines for the new designations be enforced?**

DCR acknowledges the need for active enforcement of prohibited activities (such as dumping of refuse, construction of illegal motorized or non-motorized trails, use of off-highway vehicles in areas where not allowed, or cutting of trees at boundary encroachments) in all of the designations. It is especially critical to allow Reserves to develop under natural conditions without negative human impacts. However, DCR's current and historic level of resources does not allow for optimal enforcement, and the agency will continue to seek joint or cooperative oversight while deploying its own resources efficiently.

#### **19. Will DCR still operate a Home Fuelwood Program?**

The Home Fuelwood Program will continue to be offered in suitable locations within Woodlands designations.